

8 / PRTS

09/890218
JC17 Rec'd PCT/PTO 26 JUL 2001

U180US (PCT)

Translation of the application as amended on May 16, 2001

Collimator for Limiting a Bundle of High-Energy Rays

Description

INS A1

The invention concerns a multiple leaf collimator for limiting a bundle of high-energy rays emitted by a substantially point-like radiation source and directed towards a treatment object and used in particular for the stereotactic conformation radiotherapy of tumors, wherein the collimator contains a plurality of opposing collimator leaves made of a radiation-absorbing material which can be moved by drive mechanisms into the optical path such that the contours of said optical path can be freely defined, wherein the front edges of the collimator leaves are always aligned in parallel to the optical path.

The treatment devices used today in oncological radiation therapy are provided with collimators which limit high-energy radiation, in most cases high-energy gamma radiation from a linear accelerator, in such a fashion that the rays assume exactly the same shape as the object to be treated. Since irradiation e.g. of a tumor, is implemented from different directions, a high irradiation intensity on the tumor can be effected with only limited exposure to the surrounding tissue. For absorbing high-energy radiation, the collimator

must have a thickness of several centimeters, which produces a half shadow when the passage opening has straight walls in the passage direction. Since the rays diverge from the substantially point-like radiation source, the collimator opening is smaller than the actual shape of the tumor so that the collimated rays diverge to have exactly the size of the tumor upon impingement. When the walls of the collimator opening are straight, part of the radiation will not be shielded by the full material thickness due to the inclined path of the radiation. In consequence thereof, either healthy tissue surrounding the tumor is exposed to considerable radiation or the tumor tissue will receive too little dosage. This causes damage which should be prevented. For this reason, one of average skill in the art has tried to develop different collimators which reduce or prevent these half shadows.

One suggestion to prevent half shadows which has been described in the literature, consists in providing the collimator leaves (leaves) of a collimator (multi-leaf collimator) with an irregular trapezoidal shape such that their side surfaces and the side surfaces of the outer limits of the collimator opening have the angle of the optical path. It is, however, more difficult to achieve corresponding alignment of the front edges of the collimator leaves. Many suggestions have been made to solve this problem, none of which is satisfying.

In one suggestion made e.g. in EP 0 259 989 B1, EP 0 556 874 B1, EP 0 562 644 B1, US 5 166 531 and DE 33 11 870 C2, the front edges of the collimator leaves have a rounded shape such that the outer rays of the bundle contact these front edges tangentially. Through this solution, the half shadow can be weakened but not prevented. The same is true for a further suggestion made in EP 0 259 989 B1, EP 0 556 874 B1 and EP 0 562 644 B1, wherein the radiation must pass two sequential collimator openings. In DE 195 04 054 A1, such graduation of the front edges of the collimator leaves was further refined by constructing each collimator leaf from a plurality of rods, disposed one on top of the other such that they can be displaced with respect to one another. This collimator is complicated due to the large number of parts and exhibits increased radiation leakage due to the bordering of many collimator leaf elements and the associated unavoidable tolerances. Moreover, no drive mechanism is provided. Adjustments must be made by hand and automatic computer-controlled adjustment of the collimator opening is not possible.

DE 33 11 870 C2, US 3 151 245, US 4 987 309, US 5 144 647, EP 0 193 509, EP 0 245 768 B1, the substantially identical EP 0 387 921, and EP 0 314 214 B1 proposed moving the collimator leaves along curved paths such that the front edges of the collimator leaves are always aligned parallel to the optical path. This requires complicated guidance of the collimator leaves. The arrangement of such complicated guidance means imposes limits on the goal of minimizing the thickness of the

collimator leaves. Collimator leaves must be thin to exactly reproduce the shape of the tumor, since rough graduations result in healthy tissue also being irradiated and destroyed or badly damaged. Moreover, if the collimator leaves have the shape of irregular trapezoids and are guided on curved paths, jamming can occur in consequence of this geometrical shape. To prevent same, DE 37 11 245 A1 proposes tapering the collimator leaves towards their front end facing the optical path. Wide opening of a collimator of this type produces gaps which cause increased leakage of rays. Finally, the problems of EP 0 314 213 B1 and US 4 987 309 were believed to be solved by disposing the trapezoidal collimator leaves and the collimator leaves which can be displaced on curved paths such that the bundle of rays must pass through both collimator openings. Although each of the two collimators has a half shadow which is reduced by the other respective collimator, half shadows can only be eliminated with twice the shielding, i.e. almost twice as much material thickness is required. The amount of effort needed for drive and control is also doubled.

In addition, collimators have been disclosed (FR A 2519 465 and EP A 0286 858) which are composed of two pairs of shielding blocks offset from each other by 90°. These shielding blocks have front and rear components for preventing half shadows, wherein the latter can be aligned parallel to the optical path. The front blocks have sidewardly projecting bearing pins for pivoting on a holding device which is also connected to the rear blocks and on

which drive means act for adjustment. These collimators can, however, only define a rectangular beam and a shape in the form of an object which is to be treated within a living organism, such as a tumor, can not be generated. This requires a shaping multiple leaf collimator of the above mentioned kind. The technical solution cannot easily be transferred to a multiple leaf collimator since a sideward bearing of forward components of this type cannot be effected with leaves of a multiple leaf configuration at those locations at which an adjacent leaf must be disposed for forming the above mentioned shape. A strict requirement for multiple leaf collimators is the absence of any shielding gaps between the leaves forming the shape since the associated leakage would destroy healthy tissue.

It is therefore the underlying purpose of the invention to solve the above-mentioned problems and to produce a multiple leaf collimator which eliminates half shadows with as little effort as possible.

INS A2

This object is achieved in accordance with the invention in that the collimator leaves consist of a rear part which can be displaced linearly, and a front part connected thereto, wherein the front part of each collimating leaf is adjusted in correspondence with the respective position of the associated rear part through drive means such that the front edges are always aligned parallel to the optical path and such that the connection between the front part and the rear

part does not lead to any significant gaps in the volume of the radiation absorbing material.

The present invention omits complicated curved displacement of the collimator leaves to simplify mechanics and reduce leaking radiation, since the linear displacement permits closer tolerances. From the point of view of mechanics and drive technology, adjustment of the front part can be realized in a considerably better and easier fashion compared to the curved displacement of prior art. The complete surface of the full material thickness is used for shielding to completely eliminate half shadows without requiring either the increased effort or additional shielding of the above-mentioned prior art. The suggested technical solution is superior with respect to the previous approaches, in particular when the collimator leaves have a trapezoidal shape to also prevent the half shadow caused by the side surfaces of the collimator leaves. The linear guidance avoids jamming even when the collimator leaves are trapezoidal which permits closer tolerances and reduction of leakage compared to collimator leaves with curved guidance. Only the front parts require a somewhat increased tolerance to prevent interference during adjustment in consequence of the trapezoidal shape. This tolerance is minimal compared to that of a curved guidance system. It is clear that the invention is not limited to trapezoidal collimator leaves in dependence on the size of the collimator and the angle of the optical path.

The invention provides that the front part is pivoted on the rear part, such that the volume of the ray-absorbing material is substantially uninterrupted. This should be taken into consideration in the concrete embodiment of pivoting, wherein there are several possibilities which will be explained below.

It is possible to provide separate drives for displacing the rear parts of the collimator leaves and for adjustment of the front parts, respectively, wherein these are matched by computer control. The drive means are preferably designed such that forced mechanical coupling into each position of the rear part guarantees the associated alignment of the front part and thereby the front edges, to prevent misalignment of the front edges in consequence of program or drive means error. The reliability is considerably increased, which is particularly important for patients and users. Further advantages of this embodiment consist in that only one drive is required for each collimator leaf which requires correspondingly less computer work to thereby obtain more rapid calculation results and faster adjustment of the collimator to another shape.

The front part can be coupled to the rear part in many different ways. The end of the rear part can e.g. have a rounded shape and a front part with a corresponding rounded shape can be disposed thereon. It is also possible to combine segment-shaped front parts with corresponding recesses in the rear parts. However, the front parts are preferably

substantially semi-circular bodies which are securely borne in corresponding recesses at the front end of the rear parts, wherein adjustment comprises a pivoting motion about the imaginary axis of rotation at the center of the circular shape. There are different possibilities of secure mounting without considerably interrupting the volume of the radiation-absorbing material, e.g. dove-tailed guidance means, guidance in grooves, retaining pins guided in slots, etc. The height of the rear part preferably substantially corresponds to the diameter of the semi-circular body, wherein the front ends of the rear part are displaced to the rear such that any required inclined position of the front edges of the collimator leaves is possible. This embodiment has the advantage that the pivoted front part also has the same height as the associated rear part for all possible positions. This is advantageous for the concrete design for bearing and guiding the collimator leaves.

The cross-sections of the collimator leaves preferably have asymmetrical trapezoidal shapes such that their side surfaces extend approximately parallel to the optical path, wherein the inner surfaces of the lateral sides bordering the outer collimator leaves extend at an inclination such that they join with the outer collimator leaves without leaving gaps. In this fashion, a half shadow is prevented since all limitations of the collimator opening correspond approximately to the optical path. As was mentioned above, such an embodiment of the collimator in accordance with the invention is very advantageous. The front parts preferably

have sufficient lateral play to guarantee adjustment, despite the trapezoidal shape.

One embodiment provides that the collimator leaves can be displaced beyond the central line of the possible collimator opening to permit reproduction of tumors having any irregular contour, e.g. including U-shaped contours which require that the collimator leaves cross the central line of the collimator opening. This embodiment also facilitates modulation of the intensity of the rays through temporary covering of certain regions. A further advantage is that the collimator leaves can be closed asymmetrically, e.g. like a zipper. This considerably reduces leakage of rays in the closing region compared to that associated with closing all collimator leaves in the center. Clearly, to achieve such displacement beyond the central line, the length and distance of displacement of the collimator leaves must be dimensioned correspondingly.

In order to position the collimator leaves (like in the above-mentioned EP 0 245 768 B1 and in the largely identical EP 0 387 921 A1) a drive mechanism may be provided which adjusts several collimator leaves, one after the other. It is, however, preferred to provide each collimator leaf with one single controllable drive to permit quick computer-controlled shape changes. This is particularly important for dynamic irradiation of a tumor, wherein irradiation is enabled from different sides with relatively frequent changes. Even if the object of irradiation has an irregular

shape and rapid change of the contour is required, maximum protection of the surrounding tissue is thereby ensured. The individual drives are also suitable if collimator leaves must be temporarily moved into the collimator opening during irradiation to weaken the intensity of radiation in certain regions. To increase the safety and reduce the number of drives, these individual drives preferably exhibit the forced coupling mentioned above.

Control of the collimator during operation thereof is preferably effected by a computer which adjusts the contour and position of the collimator opening to the object of irradiation in the respective direction of radiation, wherein the computer receives the data from a device for detecting the shape of the object of radiation and a control means examines the result of the adjustment. The collimator leaves can thereby be advantageously disposed in a displaceable collimator block which is provided for positioning the collimator opening relative to the object of irradiation and to the radiation source. The collimator block can be divided along a central line which permits separate displacement of these halves. Moving apart of the two halves additionally increases the collimator opening. The collimator block can also be mounted to a gantry which permits a relative motion between the collimator and the patient such that the patient can be irradiated from all sides through adjustment of the collimator opening to the shape of the object of irradiation. In this fashion, the collimator can be used to encircle a tumor to be irradiated, wherein this motion must not

necessarily be circular but can also extend through three dimensions. A radiation method of this type is known, but is facilitated in combination with the invention since the inventive collimator provides improved construction and drive and the computing effort is considerably reduced. This method offers, in particular, high safety with regard to malfunction due to the forced coupling between the two drives.

The forced coupling of the drive of the rear parts of the collimator leaves and the actuator for the front parts can be realized by a transmission. To increase the space for the transmissions, the transmissions, optionally also the drives, can be disposed alternately at the top of one collimator leaf and at the bottom of the neighboring collimator leaf. This is particularly important if the collimator leaves must be very narrow, as is required for an exact reproduction of the shape of the tumor. A first embodiment of the drives provides that the actuator for the front parts is designed to align the front parts with respect to the radiation source when individual collimator leaves are adjusted, when all leaves are adjusted, or when some of the collimator leaves are adjusted. This permits movement of the overall collimator block or, through adjustment of the collimator block halves, to move them apart and thereby increase the collimator opening. This permits treatment of larger irradiation objects with a relatively small collimator without having to do without the inventive alignment of the front edges of the collimator leaves.

As drive, the rear part can have an associated collimator toothed rack into which a driving toothed wheel engages, wherein the collimator toothed rack associated with the rear part can also be embodied as teeth in a longitudinal edge of the rear part of the collimator leaves.

To provide good guidance of the collimator leaves, a rear section proximate the region of the gearing in the longitudinal edge of the rear part can be disposed in the collimator block at a displaced height such that a guiding element connected to the side of the collimator block above the gearing can engage in a guiding groove of the rear part or in the rear section. This produces secure guidance directly in the vicinity of the engagement region of the toothed wheel to provide exact play-free displacement of the collimator leaves. Clearly, additional guidance means can also be provided, e.g. a guidance for the edge of the rear part opposite to the gearing. In a particularly advantageous fashion, a guiding element is provided which is guided in a groove of the longitudinal edge of the rear part for securely retaining the collimator leaf in its position even if the neighboring collimator leaf assumes a substantially different position and is therefore no longer directly adjacent.

The driving means for adjusting the front part may be a front edge toothed rack which is hinged to the front part outside of its axis of rotation and into which a toothed gear engages to produce an adjustment path which differs from that of the rear part. The differing adjustment path permits

corresponding adjustment of the front edge. Although this can be effected e.g. with separate drives, a forced mechanical coupling is preferred.

One embodiment of simple construction and reliable function provides that the collimator toothed rack and the front edge toothed rack are disposed on a longitudinal edge of the rear part and have different subdivisions to produce the differing adjustment paths, wherein a toothed wheel engages both toothed racks, wherein the subdivision difference lies within the tolerance limits of the gearing. With respect to a transmission disposed below a collimator, the subdividing of the front edge toothed rack is larger than that of the collimator toothed rack. With respect to a transmission disposed above a collimator, the subdividing of the front edge toothed rack must be smaller than that of the collimator toothed rack. This embodiment has, of course, only exemplary character and further possibilities are feasible, e.g. spindle drives with different pitches.

The driving toothed wheels or further toothed wheels which engage both toothed racks can be disposed in the collimator block. Alternatively, the further toothed wheels can be borne by the base frame. One toothed wheel can take over both functions or two separate toothed wheels can be provided.

In a further development, the driving toothed wheel engages in a driving toothed rack and is disposed in a displaceable

collimator block or in two displaceable collimator block halves, and one further toothed wheel, which engages the collimator toothed rack and the front edge toothed rack, is disposed on a base frame. The collimator block as a whole or the collimator block halves - one for each part of the collimator leaves - can be displaced on the base frame. The base frame can thereby be disposed between the collimator block and the gantry or the base frame can be the gantry itself. The driving toothed rack can be a separate toothed rack or a continuation of the collimator toothed rack relative to a shorter front edge toothed rack. This embodiment has the advantage that even when displacing the collimator block or the collimator halves, any setting of the front edges of the collimator leaves with respect to the radiation source, once adjusted, is maintained so that the front edges are always aligned parallel to the radiation even if the collimator block or the collimator block halves are adjusted. This is effected by the further toothed wheel which engages both toothed racks thereby ensuring the relative orientation and positioning of both toothed racks throughout the entire travel region to considerably increase the possible adjustment region and the collimator opening.

Of course, there are many further possible types of control and forced mechanical couplings. The drive for the rear parts can e.g. be connected to a link drive for the adjustment of the front parts. These link drives can have different designs. A connecting link guide can be directly connected to the bearing of the driving toothed wheel and a slider of the

connecting link guide can cooperate with the front part. The connecting link guides can also be directly connected to a base frame and displaceable collimator block halves - one for each part of the collimator leaves - are directly connected to the bearings of the driving toothed wheels. A concrete embodiment of a connecting link guide provides that a slider is mounted to a cable control which is guided to the front part and is mounted with one end above, and with the other end below the imaginary axis of rotation of the front part. A further possible embodiment consists in that the slider is mounted at a rear end of a two-armed lever wherein the axis of rotation of the lever is disposed on the rear part and its front end engages in the rear region of the front part to effect adjustment.

Preferably, a guidance is provided on at least one, preferably both longitudinal edges of each rear part which can be designed e.g. such that a groove is formed on the longitudinal edge in which a guiding element of the collimator block slides. Further possible guidance means are feasible to ensure that a collimator leaf is securely guided even when the neighboring collimator leaf is displaced to such an extent that the collimator leaf is exposed.

The collimator leaves can serve as compensating means for generating different radiation intensities by temporarily introducing them into the collimator opening during irradiation. This reduces the need for separate compensating

means without excluding use thereof along with the inventive collimator.

The problems on which the invention is based, and embodiments of the invention are described below with reference to schematic drawings.

INS A3

Fig. 1 shows the basic construction of a radiation device in which the inventive collimator can be used;

Fig. 2 shows a collimator opening of a multi-leaf collimator;

Fig. 3a shows the principle of half shadow production with collimators according to prior art;

Fig. 3b shows the principle of half shadow prevention by the inventive collimator;

Fig. 3c shows partial prevention of half shadows through a trapezoidal embodiment of the collimator leaves;

Fig. 4 shows the principle of an inventive embodiment;

~~Fig. 5a and 5b show tooth subdivisions of this embodiment,~~

Fig. 6 shows coupling of a front part of a collimator leaf;

Fig. 7 shows an arrangement of collimator leaves;

Fig. 8 shows mounting of collimator leaves;

Fig. 9a and 9b show a second embodiment;

Fig. 10a and 10b show a third embodiment;

Fig. 11 shows a fourth embodiment; and

Fig. 12 shows a further design of the second embodiment.

INS AG

Fig. 1 shows the basic design of a radiation device in which the collimator 1 in accordance with the invention can be used. The collimator 1 is disposed on a collimator block 19 which is mounted to a gantry 41. The gantry 41 contains the radiation source 3. The radiation can be produced e.g. by a linear accelerator 43. The gantry 41 can be rotated about a horizontal axis of rotation 44, wherein the rays 2 are directed towards a radiation object 20, e.g. a tumor. The radiation object 20 is located in the isocenter of the rays 2, and the radiation source 3 as well as the collimator 1 circle around the patient 46 through rotation of the gantry 41. The treatment table 42 can also simultaneously rotate about a rotational axis 45 to further change irradiation of rays 2 onto the treatment object 20 within the patient 46. Of course, further adjustments are feasible. The intent is that the object to be treated 20 experiences maximum radiation dose by changing the different radiation directions while,

however, protecting surrounding tissue to the greatest extent possible by only exposing it to the rays 2 for short periods of time. Furthermore, certain regions of the body must often be completely avoided such as e.g. the spinal cord or organs, wherein the irradiation directions must be chosen accordingly. The rays 2 are formed by the collimator opening 18 such that they impinge on the radiation object 20 in correspondence with its shape to protect the surrounding tissue. The profile of the tumor is detected e.g. through computer tomography recordings. This data is processed to generate a collimator opening 18 corresponding to this shape and can optionally irradiate different portions of the irradiation object 20 with different intensities. The shape and intensity are calculated and adjusted for each irradiation direction.

Fig. 2 shows a collimator opening 18 of a multi-leaf collimator. The invention concerns such a collimator 1 having the above-mentioned improvements which are also shown and explained in the subsequent figures. In accordance with the invention, the collimator leaves 4 and 4' can produce a collimator opening 18 which corresponds to the shape of the object to be treated 20 without producing a half shadow 47. This will be further explained below. Fig. 2 shows the principle of a collimator 1 designed as a multi-leaf collimator which reproduces the shape of a tumor in a collimator opening 18 using collimator leaves 4, 4'. Advantageous embodiments of the invention thereby provide that the collimator leaves 4 and 4' can be pushed beyond the

central line 17 of the maximum possible collimator opening 18. This is required e.g. if the radiation object 20 has a U- or similar shape which can be reproduced only if the collimator leaves 4 and 4' extend beyond the central line 17. Moreover, the collimator leaves 4 and 4' can be closed, as shown at the left and right sides. The collimator leaves on these sides do not abut at the central line 17 but are staggered to reduce leakage radiation in this region.

Fig. 3a shows the principle of half shadow 47 production in some collimators of prior art. The collimator leaves 4 and 4' therein have straight front edges 5 and 5'. If rays 2 from a substantially point-like radiation source 3 pass through the collimator opening 18, part of these rays 2 must pass through the entire material thickness and another part of the rays does not contact the material. In the intermediate region, the rays penetrate only part of the material of the collimator leaves 4, 4' and are partly absorbed to produce half shadows 47. The further the collimator leaves 4 and 4' are moved apart by the adjustment 48, the larger this half shadow 47. Due to this half shadow 47, the surroundings of this radiation object 20 are also irradiated with attenuated intensities 2, in addition to the irradiation object 20. This causes unnecessary damage to the surrounding tissue of the patient 46. With rounded front edges 5, 5' or with collimator leaves 4, 4' which are disposed on top of one another in steps, such half shadows can be reduced, however, not eliminated.

Fig. 3b shows the principle of avoiding half shadows 47 in the inventive collimator 1. The inventive collimator leaves 4 and 4' are designed such that their front edges 5 and 5' are always oriented in parallel to the rays 2, despite their linear displacement to thereby ensure that a ray 2 either completely passes through the collimator opening 18 and hits the radiation object 20 or is absorbed by the entire material thickness of the collimator leaves 4 and 4'. The front edges 5 and 5' are aligned according to the adjustment 48 of the collimator leaves 4 and 4' thereby ensuring that a half shadow 47 is prevented for all widths of the collimator opening 18.

Fig. 3c shows partial prevention of a half shadow by designing the collimator leaves 4 and 4' in an asymmetrical trapezoidal shape 13. The viewing direction of the collimator 1 is rotated through 90° with respect to the representations of Fig. 3a and 3b and directed onto the front edges 5, 5'. The design shown prevents the side surfaces 14 of the collimator leaves 4, 4' and the lateral borders 16 from producing half shadows 47. The collimator leaves 4 and 4' thereby have an asymmetrical trapezoidal shape 13 such that the two side surfaces 14 of each collimator leaf 4, 4' extend parallel to the rays 2. The inner surfaces 15 of the lateral borders 16 also have a corresponding alignment and are adjacent to the side surfaces 14 of the outer collimator leaves 4 and 4', without leaving gaps.

In Fig. 3c the two outer collimator leaves 4 and 4' are shown in cross section, since they are closed. The other collimator leaves 4, 4' are opened to a greater or lesser degree to thereby form the collimator opening 18. A corresponding design of the collimator leaves 4, 4' was disclosed in prior art, but had the functional problems discussed above. Only the inventive design of the collimator leaves 4 and 4' permits guaranteed trouble-free function despite the asymmetrical trapezoidal shapes 13 without having to accept large tolerances or introduce a further set of collimator leaves, displaced by 90°, in the optical path 2. In this fashion, both the functions shown in Figs. 3b and Fig. 3c can be provided by the same set of collimator leaves 4 and 4'. This is a considerable advantage over prior art.

Fig. 4 shows the principle of an inventive embodiment of the collimator 1. The collimator leaves 4 and 4' comprise rear parts 6 and 6' and front parts 7 and 7'. The latter are formed as semi-circular bodies 8 and 8' and are disposed in corresponding recesses 9 and 9' of the rear parts 6 and 6' of the collimator leaves 4 and 4'. Such mounting can e.g. be effected when the front parts 7 and 7' have a groove 56 about their semi-circular shape into which the rear parts 6 and 6' engage with corresponding graduation in the region of the corresponding recesses 9 and 9' such that full material thickness is maintained. Retaining pins 49 are provided within corresponding slots 50 for securely mounting the front parts 7 and 7'. The length of the slots 50 defines the adjustment region. When the collimator leaves 4 and 4' are

displaced in accordance with the arrows 48, the front parts 7 and 7' are simultaneously turned about an imaginary axis of rotation 36 such that the front edges 5 and 5' are always aligned parallel to the rays 2. This means that the front edges 5 and 5' are perpendicular in the region of the central line 17 of the possible collimator opening 18 and, when displaced from this central line 17, are oriented in the one or the other direction such that they point towards the radiation source 3. To guarantee these adjustments, the front ends 12 of the rear parts 6 and 6' must be set back correspondingly such that the front edges 5 and 5' are located in the region of these front ends 12 only when maximum adjustment has been reached. The height 12 of the rear parts 6 and 6' is preferably as large as the diameter 11 of the semi-circular bodies 8 and 8', thereby ensuring constant material thickness. This embodiment has the further advantage that the front parts 7 and 7' always have the same height as the rear parts 6 and 6'.

Fig. 4 also shows a transmission for the collimator leaves 4 and 4' which ensures that the front edges 5 and 5' are correctly aligned for each position of the collimator leaves 4 and 4'. This can be effected through forced mechanical coupling defined by a driving toothed wheel 23 which engages a collimator toothed rack 21 as well as a front edge toothed rack 22, wherein these toothed racks 21 and 22 have different subdivisions 52, 53 or 54 (see Fig. 5a and b) to achieve the different required adjusting motions. It must thereby be guaranteed that the different subdivisions 52, 53 or 54 lie

within the tolerance limits of the gearing of the driving toothed wheel 23 to prevent jamming. The arrow 51 shows the direction of rotation of the driving toothed wheels 23 and the arrows 48 show the adjustment of the collimator leaves 4 and 4' caused by this driving direction. The collimator leaf 4 of Fig. 4 assumes the maximum opening position 64 and the collimator leaf 4' assumes the maximum over-travel 63. The latter represents maximum traverse of the central line 17. This over-travel permits the collimator opening 18 to reproduce a tumor 20 of any shape, up to the size of the maximum collimator opening 18.

The arrangement of the drives in Fig. 4 at the lower end of the collimator leaves 4 and 4' is merely an example. It is also possible to dispose these drives 23, 21, 22 in the upper region or alternately at the bottom of a collimator leaf 4 or 4' and at the top of the neighboring collimator leaf 4 or 4' to thereby obtain more space for the drives. In the embodiment of Fig. 4, the teeth of the collimator toothed rack 21 are milled into a longitudinal edge 37 (see Fig. 7) of a rear part 6 or 6'. The front edge toothed rack 22 is disposed within a central groove 66 of this milled collimator toothed rack 21 (Fig. 8) and is pivotally connected to the front part 7, 7' via a pivot 57 to effect adjustment. Since the collimator toothed rack 21 and the front edge toothed rack 22 have different divisions 52, 53, 54, the driving toothed wheel 23 provides different advances. The advance difference can be defined by the subdivision differences.

The different tooth subdivisions 52,53,54 are shown in Fig. 5a and 5b. Fig. 5a shows the subdivisions 52,54 of collimator toothed rack 21 and front edge toothed rack 22 when they are disposed above the collimator leaves 4 and 4'. In this case, the subdivision 52 of the collimator toothed rack 21 is larger than the subdivision 54 of the front edge toothed rack 22 which produces a larger advance of the collimator toothed rack 21 compared to that of the front edge toothed rack 22. If the rear part 6, 6' is moved in the direction of the double arrow 48, its displacement is somewhat larger than that of an upwardly disposed front edge toothed rack 22 to turn the front part 7,7' such that the front edge 5, 5' extends parallel to the rays 2. This alignment is ensured in all positions, even when the central line 17 is crossed. In Fig. 5b, the subdivision 52 of the collimator toothed rack 21 is smaller than the subdivision 53 of the front edge toothed rack 22 when it is disposed below the collimator leaves 4 and 4'. The function is the same as described above with the difference that, in this arrangement, the advance of the front edge toothed rack 22 must be larger than that of the collimator toothed rack 21 for corresponding alignment of the front edges 5 and 5'.

Of course, other arrangements are also possible. The toothed racks 21 and 22 can also be disposed on rear extensions of the collimator leaves 4 or 4' and it is also possible to provide a separate driving toothed wheel 23 to guarantee allocation of the advances for the two toothed racks 21 and 22 via a no-load toothed wheel 24.

Fig. 6 shows coupling of a front part 7 or 7' to a rear part 6 or 6' of a collimator leaf 4 or 4' and shows how the front edge toothed rack 22 is guided in a groove 66 which was milled in the center of the collimator toothed rack 21. Both gearings are therefore at the same height and a single toothed wheel 23 or 24 can engage both gearings. Since the collimator toothed rack 21 is directly milled in a longitudinal edge 37 of a rear part 6 or 6', this adjustment will be transferred directly onto this rear part 6 or 6'. To adjust the front parts 7 and 7', the front edge toothed rack 22 is pivotally mounted 57 to the front part 7 or 7' for transmitting the adjustment motion.

Fig. 7 shows displaced arrangement of the rear parts 6 or 6' of the collimator leaves 4 or 4'. This displaced arrangement serves to accommodate guidance means 38 via grooves 26 and 39. Such grooves 26, 39 can be milled into either the side surfaces 14 or into the longitudinal edges 37.

Fig. 8 shows the arrangement of such guidance means 38 as well as disposition of a driving toothed wheel 23, a toothed wheel 24, the collimator toothed rack 21, and the front edge toothed rack 22. A first guidance 38 is defined by a groove 39 milled into the longitudinal edge 37 of the rear part 6 or 6' in which a guiding element 40 of the collimator block 19 runs. A further guidance 38 has a guiding groove 26 located in the side surface 14 of a rear part 6 or 6'. A guiding element 25 of the collimator block 19 also engages in this

guiding groove 26. The guiding groove 26 is disposed at the end of the rear part 6 or 6' where the collimator toothed rack 21 is located. The collimator toothed rack 21 is milled into a longitudinal edge 37 of the rear part 6 or 6'. The central region of this collimator toothed rack 21 is provided with a groove 66 in which the front edge toothed rack 22 is disposed such that a toothed wheel 24 or 23 engages in said gearing and also in the gearing of the collimator toothed rack 21. Different advances are achieved due to the different subdivisions, as described above.

Fig. 9a and 9b show a second embodiment of the invention which differs from the first embodiment in that a driving toothed rack 55 and a driving toothed gear 23 are located in the front region of the rear part 6 or 6' and the collimator toothed rack 21 and the front edge toothed rack 22 are disposed in the rear region. A non-loaded toothed wheel 24 engages both toothed racks 21 and 22 to transmit the differing advance to the front edge toothed rack 22. In the present embodiment, the driving toothed wheel 23 is disposed in a collimator block 19 or in a collimator block half which can be displaced with respect to a base frame 58. The further toothed wheel 24 is connected to the base frame 58 via a bearing 59. In this arrangement, the front edges 5 and 5', once correctly adjusted, remain aligned and parallel to the rays 2 even when the entire collimator block 19 is displaced with respect to the radiation source 3 or if two collimator block halves are moved apart to enlarge the collimator opening. This is shown in Figs. 9a and 9b. The collimator

block 19 of Fig. 9a is in a first position with respect to the center line 17 and, in Fig. 9b, in a second position displaced in the direction of the arrow 60. This displacement produced a change in the angle α_2 of the front part 7 or 7' via the mechanics shown, such that the front edges 5 or 5' also extend parallel to the rays 2 in the new position. The figure shows that the front edge 5 or 5' in Fig. 9b has a larger distance from the center line 17 than in Fig. 9a, and the angle α_1 was increased to α_2 through displacement.

The driving toothed rack 55 in the front region can thereby be identical to the gearing of the collimator toothed rack 21 or have a different subdivision or tooth size. In any event, the front edge toothed rack 22 must not have any teeth in this region and lies in the groove 66 at a depth which permits the driving toothed wheel 23 to run in the driving toothed rack 55 and the front edge toothed rack 22 to be freely displaced in this region.

Fig. 10a and 10b show a third embodiment wherein the adjusting motion of the front parts 7 and 7' is effected through a linkage. In this embodiment as well, the rear parts 6 or 6' are provided with a driving toothed rack 55 for adjusting the rear part 6 or 6' via a driving toothed wheel 23. A connecting link guide 27 is joined by a rigid connection 61 to the driving toothed wheel 23 for producing adjustment of the front part 7 or 7'. A slider 28 runs in this connecting link guide 27 which is mounted to a cable drive 29. One end 30 of this cable drive 29 is mounted above

the imaginary axis of rotation 36 at the front part 7 or 7` and the other end 31 below said imaginary axis of rotation 36.

Fig. 10a and 10b show the possible adjustment range. Fig. 10a shows the position of the maximum over-travel 63 and Fig. 10b shows the maximum opening 64. The adjustment displacement 48 is transferred via the driving toothed wheel 23 to the rear part 6 or 6` and the slider 28 is displaced by the connecting link guide 27 in the direction of the arrow 65.

Fig. 11 shows a fourth embodiment which differs from the third embodiment in that the slider 28 is located at the end of a two-armed lever 32. The lever 32 pivots on the rear part 6 or 6` via a rotation axle 33. The front end 35 of the two-armed lever 32 pivots on the front part 7 or 7`, i.e. in the rear region, removed from the imaginary axis of rotation 36.

In this embodiment, the two-armed lever 32 is pivoted by the connecting link guide 27 thereby effecting the adjustment leading to the corresponding alignment of the front edges 5 or 5` of the collimator leaves 4 or 4`. A certain recess must be provided in the rear parts 6 or 6` for accommodating the two-armed lever 32. Fig. 11 shows the maximum over-travel 63 on one side and the maximum opening 64 on the other side.

Fig. 12 shows a further embodiment which is a variation of Fig. 10a and b. It differs in that the connecting link guides 27 are connected to the base frame 58 and the driving toothed

wheels 23 are connected to the collimator block 19 or collimator block halves. In this fashion, the collimator opening 18 can also be enlarged. The connecting link guides 27 must have a length which corresponds to the entire adjustment distance, i.e. the adjustment distance of the collimator leaves 4,4' and the adjustment distance of the collimator block halves. The embodiment of Fig. 11 can be modified accordingly.

The embodiments shown are, of course, only exemplary. Further embodiments are feasible in particular with respect to the forced coupling, and also with respect to the drives and design of the two parts of the collimator leaves.

List of reference numerals

- 1 collimator
- 2 rays
- 3 radiation source
- 4,4` collimator leaves
- 5,5` front edges of the collimator leaves
- 6,6` rear part of the collimator leaves
- 7,7` front part of the collimator leaves
- 8,8` semi-circular body
- 9,9` corresponding recesses
- 10 height of the rear part
- 11 diameter of the semi-circular body
- 12 front ends of the rear part
- 13 asymmetrical trapezoidal shape
- 14 side surfaces of the collimator leaves
- 15 inner surfaces of the lateral borders
- 16 lateral borders of the possible collimator opening
- 17 central line of the possible collimator opening
- 18 collimator opening
- 19 collimator block
- 20 radiation object (tumor)
- 21 collimator toothed rack
- 22 front edge toothed rack
- 23 driving toothed wheel
- 24 toothed wheel
- 25 guiding element
- 26 guiding groove
- 27 connecting link guide
- 28 slider

- 29 cable control
- 30 end of the cable control
- 31 other end of the cable control
- 32 two-armed lever
- 33 rotation axle of the two-armed lever
- 34 rear end of the two-armed lever
- 35 front end of the two-armed lever
- 36 imaginary axis of rotation
- 37 longitudinal edge of the rear part
- 38 guidance
- 39 groove
- 40 guiding element
- 41 gantry
- 42 treatment table
- 43 linear accelerator
- 44 horizontal axis of rotation of gantry
- 45 axis of rotation of treatment table
- 46 patient
- 47 half shadow
- 48 arrow: adjusting motion of the collimator leaves
- 49 retaining pin
- 50 slot
- 51 arrow: direction of rotation of the driving toothed
wheel
- 52 subdivision of the collimator toothed rack
- 53 subdivision of a front edge toothed rack disposed below
a collimator
- 54 subdivision of a front edge toothed rack disposed above
a collimator

- 55 driving toothed rack
- 56 groove for guiding the front part in a rear part
- 57 pivoting of the front edge toothed rack to the front
part
- 58 base frame
- 59 pivoting of the further toothed wheel
- 60 arrow: displacement of the collimator block
- 61 fixed connection: connecting link guide - driving
toothed wheel
- 62 deflecting rollers
- 63 maximum over-travel of a collimator leaf
- 64 maximum opening of a collimator leaf
- 65 arrow: adjustment of the slider 28
- 66 groove